



Oregon Bluegrass Association
www.oregonbluegrass.org

Bluegrass Express

Mason Smith:

Under the Hat and Behind the Mic

By Chris Carter

When you go to an *Extended Bluegrass* concert, you'll see projected on a screen behind the stage a photo of three youngsters playing stringed instruments. It looks like they are in some dark hollow.

In fact, that's where they were. Mason Smith's father and two sisters were photographed standing near their family home in Fluvanna, Kentucky.

Although Mason got hooked on playing and singing bluegrass as an adult, he carries with him a life-long love of traditional and gospel music. It plays out in a unique way during live and energy — and sometimes calm — to keep the music in the public eye.

Mason organizes the annual *Seneca Bluegrass/CMAA Gospel Show*, as well as the *Extended Bluegrass* series that runs into months of the year. He hires the bands, sets up the mics, coordinates with the venue and the sound technicians, cameras — and usually performs a welcoming song for *Extended* audiences.

You've probably seen Mason cruise a school in the Northwest. How are

some things you may not know about him.



On the way to the old home

Mason comes by his love of bluegrass honestly.

His parents moved to Oregon as his dad could find good work — outside of the coal mines.

When Mason visited the family's Kentucky hometown in 1978, his grandfather was plowing the field with a horse — and returning to a home with no indoor plumbing.

But when his father left Kentucky, he left the music behind, as well. Mason said, "I don't remember ever seeing him play the guitar" — that's in the picture above, mostly on stage. When Mason's dad moved to Portland — the home town of his wife — he stopped performing, because he couldn't find anyone who played country gospel music.

Mason played trumpet and drums as a kid. "And I took six guitar lessons, but then sax, corn and gals — well, one in particular — got in the way." Mason earned money, too, high school sweetheart, in 1981 before shipping off to Vietnam to serve.

Mason and Joyce "sang all the time" together, but Mason was too self-conscious to sing in public. Joyce passed away in 1986, before Mason found his public voice as both a singer and an actor.

Continued on Page 8